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FILE ONLY

Beirut Caller Says American Faces Execution

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BEIRUT, Lebanon, Feb. 16 — A caller claiming to represent the Islamic Holy War organization said today that it had sentenced one of four American hostages being held by the group to die.

The statement, made by an anonymous caller who telephoned a Western news agency here, came on the day that Muhammad Ali, the American former heavyweight boxing champion, arrived in Beirut to try to secure the release of the Americans, who were kidnapped in the last year.

The caller also insisted that Jeremy Levin, an American television reporter who had also been a hostage, did not escape but was freed by his captors after intervention by a noted American Islamic personality, and after the Holy War organization had ascertained that he was not involved in any activity against it.

The caller, who spoke in Arabic with a Lebanese accent, said that if Mr. Levin wants to say he escaped, "he certainly is crazy because it is very difficult to get out from the place he was in."

Journalist Has Left Lebanon

Mr. Levin, the Beirut bureau chief for Cable News Network, flew to Frankfurt from Damascus on Friday after he turned up near Baalbek in the Bekaa region of eastern Lebanon on Wednesday night.

He gave himself up to Syrian troops stationed in the area and was taken to Damascus and handed over to the United States Embassy. He told reporters that he had managed to escape from a house in Baalbek, where he had been detained for the last 11 months.

Mr. Levin's freedom came after another hostage, William Buckley, appeared on a videotape shown in London by Visnews, a television service. He had been photographed carrying a copy of a Lebanese French-language newspaper, L'Orient-Le Jour.

That appearance, as well as Mr. Levin's reappearance near Baalbek, have been taken as evidence that the hostages were being held in Lebanon.

The Baalbek area, which is under the control of Syrian troops, has a predominantly Shiite population and is a base for Shiite extremists aligned with the Iranian Islamic revolution of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

A Center for Shiites

Shiite activists linked to Tehran maintain training camps in and near Baalbek and are aided by about 800 Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Many analysts of the Middle East say they believe the activists, along with young Shiite clergymen and the Revolutionary Guards, constitute the power base of the Islamic Holy War organization.

Mr. Buckley was a political officer in the United States Embassy in West Beirut when he was kidnapped. All the hostages were seized by gunmen in West Beirut, which is predominantly Moslem.

The other three are the Rev. Benjamin Weir, a Presbyterian minister; the Rev. Martin Jenco, a Roman Catholic

priest, and Peter Kilburn, a librarian at the American University in Beirut.

The anonymous caller said the decision to free Mr. Levin was made by an Islamic court.

'You Will All Know'

The court, he said, had sentenced one of the American hostages to death.

Asked who the detainee was, the caller replied: "When he is executed you will all know about it."

He said Mr. Levin's release was in line with a promise made earlier by the Holy War organization not to harm American journalists.

The caller's reference to a noted American Islamic personality is believed to be to Mr. Ali, who is a Moslem.

He arrived this afternoon, appearing tired. An aide said he would seek the release of the four American hostages and a Saudi official believed to have been abducted by the same group.

Hussein Abdullah Farrash, the Saudi Consul, was seized by unidentified gunmen on a West Beirut street in January 1984 and has not been heard from since.

Mr. Ali arrived via London and Paris.